

**ANG****Bayan****Pahayagan ng Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas
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March 7, 2008www.philippinerevolution.net*Editorial*

Spread the fires of people's struggles to oust the Arroyo regime

The Filipino people have reached the height of their anger and repudiation of the US-Arroyo regime. They are fed up with, and outraged at, the Arroyo regime's many cases of corruption and mendacity and the acute suffering and oppression it has inflicted on them.

The protest movement is gaining breadth and momentum nationwide. Since the launching of one big rally after another in Makati on February 15 and 29, the collective outpouring of the people's anger has broadened in the national capital and various other parts of the country. All this indicates the Filipino people's resounding repudiation of the US-Arroyo ruling clique and their readiness to tread the path of militant action to put an end to the despicable regime.

More cases of the regime's corruption, lying and brutality are coming to the fore as the protest movement rages. Aside from the anomalies related to the NBN-ZTE project, another recent exposé is that of the antinational agreement entered into by the regime with China, allowing the latter to conduct oil exploration in the Spratly Islands in exchange for billions of dollars worth of loans. A myriad other cases of corruption, including the kickbacks received by the Arroyo family from the IMPSA-Caliraya deal and the Diosdado Macapagal Blvd. overpricing scheme had already been bared.

The people could no longer bear their worsening suffering and poverty. It has become apparent to them that their intensifying hardships are a direct consequence of the Arroyo regime's corruption. The increasingly dismal economic conditions of the broad

masses of the people could no longer be obscured by the regime's falsified statistics and media hype about economic progress. The people's growing misery and oppression are increasingly being linked to the regime's reeking corruption.

The regime strains to cover up its heinous crimes by distorting laws, weaving lies, suppressing the mass media and perpetrating a host of other maneuvers and fascist measures. In spite of all this, various sectors—the organized masses, the mass media, church people, businessmen, lawyers—are determined to un-

***This issue's highlights...*****Anti-Arroyo protests gain momentum**

PAGE 2

Arroyo's mad scramble to save herself

PAGE 4

NPA ambushes in Samar and Davao, raids in Negros PAGE 7

ravel and expose the truth about the regime's anomalies and corruption.

The desperate regime has stepped up its fascist suppression of those who resist it and desire its ouster. Extrajudicial killings, abductions and other acts of violence against activists, critical media persons and other harsh critics of the regime are rampant. Even rallies and other legal and peaceful forms of protest are blocked and violently dispersed.

But the regime's brutality can no longer rein in the people's seething anger and their growing resistance. The protest movement is spreading like a prairie fire across the land. Rallies have become more frequent and are joined by increasingly bigger numbers of people demanding the regime's overthrow.

We must seize the opportunity presented by the burning protests and resistance to the Arroyo regime. We must reach out to all sectors in every area of the country. We must take advantage of every opportunity to step up our efforts to arouse and organize the people. We must demonstrate the inextricable link between the people's grinding poverty and oppression from day to day and the burning issues of the regime's corruption and repressiveness. We must issue urgent calls to intensify various forms of resistance against the regime. Both open resistance to, and armed struggle against, the regime must be simultaneously waged and advanced.

Conditions are ripe for waging a new, broad and militant people power against the Arroyo regime. We must infuse it with renewed vigor from the lessons drawn from past people's uprisings. We must make it even more historic by raising the level of its organized strength especially from the most impoverished and oppressed sectors and blazing up the national and democratic struggles of the people. Let us give our all in advancing all movements towards this end until the fires of people's struggles spread like a conflagration all over the land. **AB**

Anti-Arroyo protests gain momentum

The movement to oust Gloria Arroyo has gained momentum. Successive mass actions and gatherings by various groups and sectors are being launched after a successful rally in Makati on February 15. The anti-Arroyo alliance continues to expand, with its actions and statements becoming more militant.


The youth have a significant participation, especially students from various schools in Metro Manila. According to the latest Pulse Asia survey, three out of four Metro Manila residents believe in Jun Lozada and 76% expressed distrust for Arroyo and her chief minions. Sixty-nine percent (69%) of residents said they approved of protest actions to remove all leading officials involved in the NBN-ZTE anomaly, with one-fourth of them ready to join rallies to oust Arroyo.

Huge Makati demonstration

More than 75,000 people gathered in what was dubbed an inter-faith rally in Makati City on February 29—the biggest number so far since 2005 demanding Gloria Arroyo's resignation or ouster. The rally brought together various religious groups, schools, progressive organizations, politicians, employees, businessmen and other sectors.

Leading the rally was the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN) and its allied organizations, the Watch, Pray and Act Movement led by the Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines, United Opposition, Jesus is Lord Movement, Makati Business Club and other business groups, Black and White Movement and the Catholic Educators Association of the Philippines, among others.

The rally was marked by the attendance of personalities like for-



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Contents

Editorial	
Spread the fires of people's struggles to oust the Arroyo regime	1
Anti-Arroyo protests gain momentum	2
Arroyo's mad scramble to save herself	4
New witness confirms ZTE bribery	5
Victorious tactical offensives	
NPA ambushes in Samar and Davao, raids PNP detachment in Negros	6
AFP misencounters in Bicol	7
Moro group files case on Sulu massacre at UN rights body	7
News	8

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mer presidents Corazon Aquino and Joseph Estrada, former vice president Teofisto Guingona and a number of senators, former government officials and big businessmen like Manuel Pangilinan of PLDT.

The Communist Party of the Philippines and Comrade Jose Maria Sison, chair of the International League of Peoples' Struggles issued separate statements hailing the successful protest action. Sison said that a new people power uprising may erupt once 100,000-500,000 people gather to oust Arroyo.

Tens of thousands of people succeeded in gathering in Makati despite efforts by the police and military to block protesters. Checkpoints mushroomed along all entry points to Metro Manila to bar rallyists from Southern Tagalog and Central Luzon.

Eleven jeepneyloads of rallyists from Southern Tagalog were stopped in San Cristobal, Calamba and Cabuyao, Laguna, aside from Kilusang Mayo Uno members who were blocked in San Pedro, Laguna. Hundreds of students from Dela Salle University-Dasmariñas were unable to leave Cavite.

In Quezon City, students and teachers from the University of the Philippines-Diliman were barred from marching to Makati.

Two members of the Workers' Assistance Center in Rosario, Cavite were brought to a police station for launching a protest action.

Nationwide protests

Other cities likewise launched successful mass actions. In Dagupan City, Pangasinan, an estimated 5,000 students, church leaders, residents and IBP members attended a mass at the St. John the Evangelist Cathedral and later marched to call for Arroyo's resignation.

In Pampanga, Gov. Ed Panlilio and Bishop Roberto Mallari led a "unity walk for truth" joined by some 500 students. Rallies were also held in Subic, Zambales attended by 1,000 residents and in Baguio City attended by students.

Various protest actions were launched in Bicol. In Naga, more than 2,000 persons linked arms to form a "human chain" around the city and launched a noise barrage. In Sorsogon City, a thousand people joined a rally led by BAYAN and church groups. Mass actions were likewise held in Legazpi City; Daet, Camarines Norte; and Masbate City.

In San Pablo City, Laguna, up to 1,000 people united in a prayer vigil.

In the Visayas, up to 3,000 persons from various sectors attended a rally in Bacolod City. In Iloilo City, an estimated 1,000 people marched in a "Walk for Truth and Justice." They were joined by Archbishop Angel Lagdameo, president of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines. On the other hand, 500 students and activists rallied in Cebu City. Students launched a forum at the University of the Philippines-

Tacloban City.

In Mindanao, 700 persons attended a rally in Cagayan de Oro City, along with Kamatuoran! (Truth), a broad anti-Arroyo alliance. Eight hundred people gathered in Davao City and 400 in Iligan City. Three hundred students from the Mindanao State University in Gen. Santos walked out of their classrooms to show their disgust for the regime. In Cotabato City, up to 200 persons simultaneously lit candles in protest. For the first time, activists launched a noise barrage in Digos City, Davao del Sur.

Protests abroad

Migrant Filipinos also launched protests in various parts of the globe. Part of the protests was the implementation of No Remittance Day as a way of pressuring the bankrupt Arroyo regime that depends on the billions of dollars sent by migrants.

In Hongkong, UNIFIL-Migrante led a rally on February 29. Filipinos meanwhile picketed Philippine embassies and consulates in San Francisco and Los Angeles, California; Seattle; and New York City.

Migrants in Ottawa, Winnipeg and Vancouver in Canada gathered together in protest. In Europe, a mass action was held in Italy.

In the Middle East, migrants declared February 29 a Day of Action. In Sydney, Australia, migrant Filipinos launched "Babay Gloria" (Bagong Bayani, Ayaw kay Gloria or New Heroes Hate Gloria).

Meantime, 61 former cabinet members from the Aquino, Ramos and Estrada regimes, along with members of the Arroyo cabinet who have resigned, called on cabinet members involved in the anomalies concerning the NBN-ZTE project to step down. They gave the Arroyo regime one week to institute reforms against corruption and will call for her ouster should Arroyo remain obstinate.

AB



Arroyo's mad scramble to save herself

Gloria Arroyo is in a mad scramble to extricate herself from the quagmire she now finds herself in. In her desperation, she only succeeds in exposing her lies and underscoring her severe isolation from the people.

Gimmicks galore. Arroyo strains to display her handful of supporters even as the oust Arroyo movement expands. Among this handful are members of her cabinet and governors, congressmen, mayors and military and police officials on her payroll. All of them profit from the regime's multi-tiered corruption.

Arroyo and her minions have conducted a number of "solidarity walks," with one such "walk" held in Malacañang on February 19. On February 25, the 22nd anniversary of EDSA 1, all available military and police officers, among them AFP chief of staff Gen. Hermogenes Esperon and Philippine National Police (PNP) Director General Ave-lino Razon Jr. marched along EDSA from the People Power Monument to Camp Aguinaldo to show their alleged adherence to the chain of command.

To counter anti-Arroyo rallies joined by growing numbers of people, the Arroyo camp paid a number of barangay councils to orga-

nize a pro-Arroyo rally. A handful of fake and mercenary Arroyo supporters rallied at the Welcome Rotunda on February 28-29 simultaneous with the huge mass action then being held in Makati.

Fake witness, more lies. Arroyo has concocted various lies and slanders to damage the credibility of Rodolfo Noel "Jun" Lozada Jr. Among her maneuvers was the sudden appearance of Erwin Santos, a former employee of Lozada's at the Philippine Forest Corporation (Philforest). Amid tears, Santos accused Lozada of being responsible for anomalies at Philforest. Many people found Santos' testimony laughable, especially since it was Malacañang that obviously drew up his script. Santos was unable to hoodwink anyone, and was not even invited by the Senate to testify because of his incredible statements.

On February 12, agents of the National Bureau of Investigation raided Lozada's office at Philforest in Taguig City to dig up evidence and come up with a false story line from the seized papers.

Arroyo thought she could "shed light" on the NBN project by granting an interview over dzRH on February 23. But she ended up incriminating herself when she said that she approved the project even if she knew that the contract was "flawed." She allegedly found

out about the "flaw" only on the eve of the contract signing and thus found it awkward to cancel the project outright. The next day, the regime realized that Arroyo's admission over the radio was a faux pas and has since been trying hard to deny that she ever made the statement.

Black propaganda. The regime has been spreading black propaganda in an effort to belittle the protests. It has insisted that the protests are confined to Metro Manila when mass actions are in fact widespread and have been attracting growing numbers both in the provinces and overseas.

The regime claims that conflicts are rife within the ouster movement when there is in fact an overriding unity against Arroyo within.

It likewise continues to spread lies about so-called plans by the New People's Army or the Abu Sayyaf bandit group to sow violence during rallies, when it is in fact the presence of battalions of military and police elements that indicates that the regime is ready to create havoc once Arroyo is in danger of losing her post.

Trembling in fear, sowing terror. Arroyo is deathly afraid of every witness against her who comes forward and has thus been mounting a campaign of harassment and repression.

She has ordered a tight watch against her regime's detractors, ordering the installation of a surveillance camera in front of La Salle where Lozada and his family have sought sanctuary. On February 28, Malacañang tried to spread panic among students of the Polytechnic University of the Philippines by phoning in a bomb threat on the day Lozada was scheduled to speak



at a forum in the school. It failed to stop the students from massively showing their support for Lozada and manifesting their hatred for the regime.

There has been an overkill of military and police deployments during rallies, especially last February 29. Makati was declared a "no fly zone" that day to prevent the media from capturing in pictures or on video the actual size of the rally. Convoys of rallyists from the province were likewise blocked.

On the day of the huge rally, Arroyo was so terrified that she locked herself inside Camp Crame for three hours and put high-ranking military and police officers and members of her cabinet under strict surveillance. She left Crame only when the rallyists started to go home.

On March 4, she ordered the arrest of nine activists who staged a rally in the middle of one of her sorties in Laguna.

On the night of March 6, police forces violently dispersed more than 1,000 workers from Southern Tagalog who were rallying in front of the DOLE office in Intramuros, Manila. According to initial reports, three rallyists were arrested, 13 wounded and six missing after the bloody dispersal.

Worsening crisis. Meanwhile, the International Crisis Group (ICG), a Belgium-based organization that analyzes crisis situations worldwide cited the growing presence of military forces in Metro Manila as an indicator of worsening crisis in the Philippines. The regime has justified the militarization of the national capital region by citing alleged assassination plots against Arroyo. The heightened military presence is in fact a reaction to intensifying anti-Arroyo protests in Metro Manila. AB

New witness confirms bribery in ZTE

The direct involvement of Gloria and Mike Arroyo in the anomalous NBN-ZTE project is further being unravelled as the probe on the graft-ridden contract continues.

On February 26, a new witness named Dante Madriaga, former consultant to ZTE, testified before the Senate that it was the Filipino partners of ZTE led by former COMELEC Chair Benjamin Abalos who received bribes from the Chinese corporation and facilitated kickbacks for the Arroyo couple. One of the Filipino partners, Leo San Miguel, recruited Madriaga for the project.

San Miguel allegedly disclosed to Madriaga that the payoffs to the government officials were released in three tranches. The first, he stated, was \$1 million given in August 2006 when negotiations for the contract began. The second tranche was \$10 million after NEDA approved the contract in March 2007, half of which went to the Arroyo couple. The third installment was \$30 million which was released soon after Gloria Arroyo witnessed the signing of the contract in Boao, China in April 2007. This amount was used to fund the Arroyo coalition's electoral campaign in 2007.

Because of huge kickbacks, the contract ballooned from \$50 million to a whopping \$329 million,

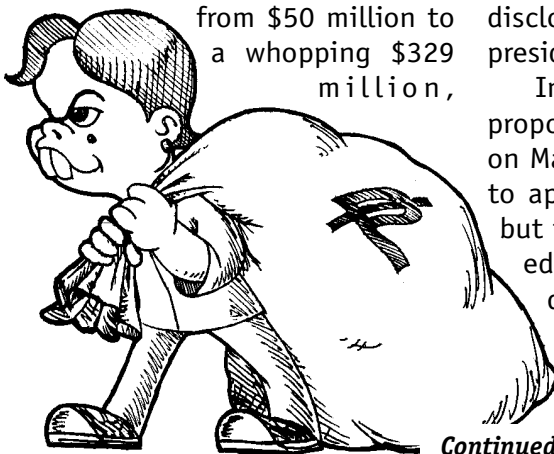
with more than \$170 million allotted to bribery.

Madriaga also said that former Malacañang chief of staff Mike Defensor was also involved in the project, and his role was to protect and secure the Arroyo couple's share during the NBN-ZTE transactions.

Still another witness, who according to Sen. Panfilo Lacson has "direct information regarding the flow of money from ZTE", is expected to corroborate Madriaga's testimony.

Meanwhile, the Senate has rejected the Supreme Court's ruling on former NEDA chief Romulo Neri's appearance before the Senate. Neri, who was among the first to blow the whistle regarding the involvement of the president's husband in the anomalous deal invoked "executive privilege" to stop the Senate from forcing him to reveal his discussions with Gloria Arroyo on the now-scuttled ZTE deal. He earlier filed a petition with the Supreme Court seeking to define the parameters of "executive privilege," a provision that bans government officials from disclosing conversations with the president.

In a compromise agreement proposed by the Supreme Court on March 4, Neri would be obliged to appear before Senate inquiries but the senators will be prohibited from asking the following questions: 1) did the president follow up on the contract; 2) did Arroyo order



Continued on "New witness..." on page 6



NPA ambushes military in Samar and Davao, raids PNP detachment in Negros

The New People's Army launched successive military actions in the latter half of February and first half of March against the armed agents of the reactionary state.

March 3. An NPA unit ambushed a platoon of the 46th IB in Barangay Pange, Motiong, Samar, killing four soldiers and wounding three others, including unit commander 2Lt. Leonard Orbase. The AFP unit was set to respond to an earlier NPA assault on the house of a policeman.

March 2. Guerrilla forces of the NPA Pulang Diwata Command raided a CAFGU detachment under the 23rd IB in Hinapuyan, Carmen, Surigao del Sur, killing Cpl. Jaire Jajuri, the commander-in-charge of the CAFGU unit.

March 1. A squad of Red fighters ambushed a military unit in Sittio Havana, Barangay Catigan, Toril, Davao City, killing three soldiers and wounding six others.

The assault took place a day after the enemy troopers provided

security to a ceremony for 300 alleged rebel returnees in Catigan who pledged loyalty to the reactionary government. The soldiers were headed back to their detachment in Barangay Bacatan when the Red fighters attacked.

February 29. Five NPA fighters raided a Philippine National Police (PNP) detachment and disarmed two members of the Special Civilian Armed Auxiliary (SCAA) in a coastal barangay in Vito, Sagay City in Negros Occidental. The two policemen had just taken a dinner break, leaving two SCAA elements on post when the NPA unit under the Roselyn "Ka Jean" Pelle Command-Negros (RJPC-Negros) launched the successful raid on the Community Police Assistance Center (COMPAC).



According to Comrade Esther Estrella, RJPC spokesperson, the Red fighters seized two M14 armalite rifles, two cal. .38 revolvers, mobile phones, magazines, ammunition and other military equipment. The victorious operation lasted for only 10 minutes after which the guerrilla unit vanished into a crowd, leaving behind leaflets condemning the US-Arroyo regime.

February 27. An armalite and a cal. .22 pistol were confiscated by NPA guerrillas from the house of a CAFGU leader in Barangay San Francisco, Panabo City, Davao del Norte. The paramilitary leader was not around during the assault.

February 26. A CAFGU element was killed after guerrilla forces under the Nonito Aguirre Command of NPA-Eastern Panay ambushed the jeep he was riding in Barangay Putian, Cuartero. He was a member of the 6th CAFGU Company stationed in Maayon, Capiz. The Red fighters likewise warned his brother who is also a CAFGU element.

February 21. Twenty guerrilla

"New witness..." from page 5

Neri to proceed with the project even after he had reported about the bribery attempt; and 3) did Arroyo order NEDA to give priority to the ZTE contract.

Both the senators and legal experts said the privilege could not be used to cover up criminal acts, and that it was not proper to limit the scope of questions that the senators may ask witnesses.

Meanwhile, Malacañang recently scrapped Executive Order (EO) 464 as a result of mounting criticisms on the controversial provision. Arroyo was forced to nullify Memorandum Order (MO) 108 as well, which contains illegal provisions the Supreme Court discarded in 2007. Both EO 464 and MC 108 impose restrictions on the attendance of members of the executive branch in congressional and senate investigations. Despite the Palace move, however, the regime continues to evade hearings, prohibit government officials from testifying and weave a web of lies. AB



VICTORIOUS TACTICAL OFFENSIVES

forces disarmed a unit of the Civilian Volunteers' Organization (CVO) in Barangay Poblacion, Montevista, Compostela Valley. According to preliminary reports, the Red fighters seized all the firearms of the paramilitary unit, including a cal .357 revolver, a cal. .45 pistol and a shotgun, aside from a hand-held radio.

On the same day, eight AFP soldiers were killed and eight others were wounded in two separate encounters between NPA guerrillas and elements of the Philippine Army in the towns of San Jose and Magsaysay, Mindoro Occidental in the third week of February.

February 20. A sparrow unit under the Celso Minguez Command of NPA-Sorsogon ambushed and killed Jamil Borrás Jaimalin, an active agent of the Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (ISAFP), in Zone 1, Bulan, Sorsogon. Borrás was responsible for the killing of student leader Rei Mon Guran and Manny Botolan, a tricycle driver in Bulan. He also helped established Barangay Intelligence Networks within and outside Bulan.

February 19. Elements of the Philippine Army 23rd Division Reconnaissance Company were conducting a military operation in Sitio Bantulaw, Barangay Paclolo, Magsaysay, Occidental Mindoro when NPA guerrilla forces assaulted them. A day later, an element of the 80th IB Charlie Coy was killed in an encounter with Red fighters in Sitio Quintal, Barangay Murtha, San Jose in the same province.

February 17. Guerrilla forces under the Alejandro Lanaja Command of NPA-Southern Mindanao Region disarmed a CAFGU unit in Barangay Kibaguba, Laak, Davao del Norte. The Red fighters seized two shotguns, two Garands and an M203 grenade launcher. The stunned paramilitary troopers failed to retaliate. AB

AFP misencounters in Bicol

SIX AFP soldiers died and two others were wounded in a misencounter between the 8th Scout Ranger Company and 3rd Scout Ranger Battalion in Irosin, Sorsogon on February 25.

To cover up the incident, the AFP issued a false report that a clash between the AFP and NPA had transpired and that two NPA fighters were killed and two M16 armalite rifles were recovered.

According to a report by the Celso Minguez Command of NPA-Sorsogon, a team of NPA snipers was on its way to the ambush site when they heard gunshots. Three government troops were hit in the first volley.

The snipers were quick to avoid being caught in the firefight when the second round of shooting ensued between the two military units. After the clash, the enemy soldiers secretly retrieved their casualties. AB

Moro groups file case on Sulu massacre at UN rights body

The Suara Bangsamoro and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front will file a case before the United Nations Human Rights Council on the massacre perpetrated by the Special Warfare Group of the Philippine Navy and Light Reaction Company of the Philippine Army. The massacre, which took place at dawn of February 4 claimed the lives of eight civilians from Ipil, Maimbung, Sulu. The announcement was made after the AFP absolved the soldiers responsible for the massacre.



Suara national chair Amira Lidasan called the results of an AFP probe claiming the slaughter was a legitimate encounter with the Abu Sayyaf "incredible". An investigation had yet to be made but the AFP had been quick to conclude that the victims were either members or coddlers of the Abu Sayyaf. The AFP merely reiterated the same line when it released on February 28 the results of an alleged investigation conducted by the Judge Advocate General's Office of the Western Mindanao Command.

The findings of an investigation by the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) released earlier revealed that no real encounter took place in Maimbung that day and that none of the victims was an Abu Sayyaf member. The report detailed how government troops assaulted the island village of Maimbung and gunned down residents as they pleaded for their lives and shouted that they were civilians.

Two of the raiders were also killed and five others wounded when they mistook each other as enemies and traded shots, according to the CHR.

The one-sided AFP investigation came under severe criticism, prompting Lt. Gen. Nelson Allaga, chief of the Western Mindanao Command, to announce that the results of their probe were just preliminary and that the soldiers involved in the incident were not yet in the clear. AB

Jonas Burgos listed in the AFP Order of Battle

EDITHA Burgos, mother of missing activist Jonas Burgos recently said in an interview that a military secret report states that her son was listed in the Order of Battle (OB) of the AFP, which establishes the motive for his abduction by military agents. The OB is a military list of targeted enemies.

According to Mrs. Burgos, a soldier (who requested anonymity) belonging to the 56th IB of the Philippine Army based in Norzagaray, Bulacan disclosed that Jonas

was suspected to be the head of the NPA Intelligence Department in the province of Bulacan and hid under the aliases Ka Raymond, Ka Ramon or Ka Simon.

Jonas has reportedly been in the AFP OB since Marso 17, 2007. The document also revealed that the military was behind his abduction in the Ever Gotesco in Quezon City in April. He underwent tactical investigation first before being reported "neutralized", a military term for "killed."

The military has also implicated Jonas' wife Marian, whose cousin has suffered harassment from persons who introduced themselves as members of the Commission on Human Rights who were trying to locate Jonas' wife and child.

Mrs. Burgos disclosed the information in the course of hearings at the Court of Appeals on her family's petition for a writ of amparo. Mrs. Burgos has also brought the campaign to surface Jonas to the United States.

Bayan Muna demands investigation of ODA-funded projects

THE Bayan Muna party called for an immediate investigation of government projects funded by foreign loans. Rep. Teddy Casiño urged Congress, through the Congressional Oversight Committee on Foreign-Funded Projects to review projects financed by overseas development assistance (ODA) to uncover anomalies involving them. The call was made after the sudden cancellation by Arroyo of 11 projects belonging to this category.

The projects are the Angat Water Utilization and Aqueduct Improvement Project Phase 2 in Metro Manila worth ₱5.75 billion; Bataan Manila Pipeline Project, ₱7.2 billion; LRT line 2 Phase 2 Extension (Santolan to Masinag, Antipolo), ₱10.33 billion; LRT line 1 North Extension, ₱5.98 billion; Cyber-Education Project, ₱26.48 billion; Mainline Southrail Project Phase 1A, ₱15.30 billion; LRT 1 line 1 South Extension (Pasay to Bacoar, Cavite) ₱15.3 billion; New Communications, Navigation, Surveillance and Air Traffic Management Systems Development Project in North Luzon, ₱2.64 billion; Regionalization of Mental Health Services in Luzon Urban Beltway, ₱1.32 billion; Redevelopment of Tacloban Airport Development Project Phase II, ₱1.12 billion; and even the construction of classrooms for elementary and high school that totals ₱45.67M. In total, these projects amount to ₱104 billion.

Looming food crisis

HUNGER is set to worsen in the Philippines and other impoverished countries with a severe food crisis expected to hit this year.

According to economists, one of the factors contributing to soaring prices of basic food items is the proliferation of biofuels. The prices of corn, for instance, which is used in the manufacture of ethanol, increased by a staggering 88% in the world market—which has also triggered a domino effect on the prices of pork and chicken. Corn is a main ingredient in animal feeds.

Also affected by skyrocketing world market prices are coconut oil (96%), rice (54%), soybeans (85%) and wheat (148%). Prices of foods that use wheat and cooking oil (such as bread) are likewise projected to increase as a result. The effects of this crisis are expected to be felt in the Philippines by March.

Another factor is the spiralling price of crude oil that has now come to \$103 per barrel, the highest recorded in the last 30 years.

Rapidly rising food prices are sure to worsen the already miserable conditions of the impoverished majority in the Philippines. National Statistical Coordination Board figures state that the proportion of poor Filipinos increased from 24.4% in 2003 to 26.9% in 2006. In fact, up to 80% of Filipinos live in abject poverty because of widespread unemployment and wages pegged at extremely low levels.

American soldier in Japan rapes Filipina

A Filipina migrant worker was raped by an American soldier in Okinawa, Japan on February 18. The victim has filed charges against the rapist and is now under the protection of the Okinawa police.

The incident has fueled outrage anew among Filipinos. Successive protests were launched by various women's groups led by Gabriela, at the US embassy to condemn the rape and push for an end to US military presence in the Philippines and other Asian countries. The militant women's group likewise condemned the Arroyo regime's inaction over the issue. If this case is not closely monitored, said Gabriela, the puppet regime will surely cover up the crime just as it did on the rape case of a Filipina in Subic in 2006.

In a related development, 52 women representatives passed a resolution supporting the victim in filing charges against the American soldier. They al-

so called on the Arroyo government to provide legal and financial assistance to the victim throughout the duration of the case and urged the Arroyo government to file a diplomatic protest against the United States.

The Japanese people likewise abhor the US military bases and the huge American military presence in their country. The rape of the Filipina in Okinawa occurred just a few days after an earlier rape of a 14-year old Japanese student by another American soldier. Outraged, the local government of Okinawa imposed a curfew and restricted American troop movement in the area. Irate Okinawans also set up a surveillance camera at the gates of the base to monitor the soldiers' movements. They have long been demanding the immediate pullout of all American troops due to repeated cases of human rights violations and the trampling of the Japanese people's sovereignty.

Actual US expenses on Iraqi war amount to \$3 trillion

THE costs of the US' war and five-year occupation of Iraq has reached a staggering \$3 trillion, or ten times more than what is stated in official reports, according to a study conducted by Joseph Stiglitz, former World Bank chief economist.

Stiglitz said the inflated expenses are due to huge contracts worth \$193 million bagged by Halliburton, a close ally of Vice President Dick Cheney; high salaries of contracted private security forces (\$400,000/year) compared to the relatively low salaries of soldiers (\$40,000/year); and overpriced contracts for items such as painting that could have been awarded to the Iraqis at \$5 million but were instead contracted out to an American company at \$25 million. A huge part of the expenses also went to hos-

pitalization, caring for the sick and funerals for war casualties that were not reflected in the military budget but were instead posted in other departments like the Department of Health.

The actual amount is even bigger if soaring prices of oil are to be factored in. Five years after the occupation, the US has not benefited from Iraqi oil. The total costs also exclude expenses incurred for attending to internal and external Iraqi refugees, medical treatment of Iraqi casualties and the long-term rehabilitation of both American and Iraqi bombing casualties.

The US has resorted to foreign borrowing to sustain its terrorist war on the Iraqi people. A substantial part of this loan amounting to \$1 trillion came from China.

Meanwhile, according to a study by an economist of the UK

Defence Department, the UK has already incurred war expenses amounting to 5 billion euro (\$7.5 billion) as of 2006. An estimated \$1 billion was also spent last year.

Raul Castro is new president of Cuba

RAUL Castro was elected Cuban president on February 25 by the National Assembly of Cuba after the ailing Fidel Castro formally resigned as president. Ever since Fidel fell ill in 2005, Raul has taken on the duties of the president of Cuba while concurrently serving as chief of the Armed Forces of Cuba. Raul Castro, who is a younger brother of Fidel, is also a veteran of the Cuban revolution.